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# The Workshop

## A Monthly Journal, devoted to Progress of the Useful Arts

EDITED BY

PROF. W. BAUMER, I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

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### CRYSTAL MANUFACTURE AND JEWELLERY.

Among the valuable bequests of grand old Classical Art which must ever remain the objects of most serious study to the Art-worker of all times as models of unsurpassed beauty, the vessels of Ancient Greece, Rome and Etruria are pre-eminently attractive by their great richness and purity. For the creations of these classical periods in Art, vanished alas! long ago, are distinguished by the greatest perfection of form as well as truthfulness of expression, realized by the simplest means and executed in the plainest material. Indeed in the still extant remains of these epochs, and principally in antique vessels, the ornament is usually very scantily distributed, and never appears as mere outward show or offshoot of caprice, but is closely associated with the artistic conception and structure of the work, as the necessary result of its purpose, and the natural outflow of an innate æsthetic sentiment.

These forms must however be nothing more than motives for suggestion to the modern manufacturer; for here, as in all branches of art, mere servile imitation is highly objectionable and undignified; especially must great caution be urgently insisted upon, when form is to be given to the original conception in a new material. Moreover, a great gap which unfortunately it is now impossible to fill up exists with regard to the various works of Antiquity in those branches of the Useful Arts to which we devote the present article. Thoroughly as we are acquainted with the Ceramic Art of the Ancients, perfectly as we are able to pass in review their Bronzes, our notions are just as incomplete and imperfect of their productions in precious metals; for they are based solely on a few specimens of jewellery, which chance only may in most cases have caused to escape the vandalism of greedy conquerors, to whom, from their being of great intrinsic value, they presented an attractive booty. Moreover, the classical period was ignorant of many a *technique*, reserved for the invention or at least for the more perfect development of later times. Thus the few antique models in these branches of Art-Industry which have been handed down to us, afford but a scanty

help to the modern jeweller and glass-manufacturer in the exercise of their artistic taste.

The most flourishing time of the two last mentioned Arts does not coincide however with that of grand Hellenic Art, for it was much later, i. e., during the Cinque-cento period, nay in the seventeenth century, that they reached the height of their perfection. Then only Italian, French and German jewellers and Crystal-cutters were in possession of those technical resources, with which in hundreds of workshops they elaborated with untiring zeal and energy, works of the most exquisite finish which characterize the highly artistic age of the Renaissance. Here we see *niello*, or inlaid enamelwork, brought to perfection, and the filigree worked with a dexterous and skilful hand, there the artist incrustates the metal with the most splendid enamels, and precious stones contribute to the decoration, not only of valuable metal, but also of crystal vessels. The crystal manufacture, once brought to such high perfection in Classical Antiquity, is resuscitated from the oblivion into which it had sunk by the rapid degeneracy of Western Art; the use of most magnificent and rare material is thereby necessitated, and crystal manufacture reaches its zenith.

From the combination of such highly perfected processes, new works of most exquisite artistic taste and elegance, creations of great originality, make their appearance, and the inexhaustible imagination of the creative artist receives a new impulse which results in productions of everlasting value, the types of which are vainly sought in works of anterior epochs.

Our modern glass manufacture can borrow numberless most beautiful profiles from those splendid vessels\* which owe their origin to the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries; and the charming, engraved ornaments with which they are adorned may be directly transmitted by the original manufacturing process, or excellently imitated by etching.

The same is true of metal mounts with which the

\* see illustration No. 17; p. 157.

Renaissance adorns the crystals, and which it arranges and distributes with a skill and delicacy peculiar to itself. But they must be used with intelligence and caution, if, by marking the prominent features, they are to contribute successfully to a truly artistic effect of the whole. For in connection with the aerial appearance of glass and crystal, the mounting, if overcharged, must appear clumsy, and will interfere with form and outline, elegance and dexterity in the ornamental treatment being of first requirement in order to secure success. The vessels of these periods will therefore equally captivate the interest of the jeweller and crystal cutter, who besides finding the most beautiful ornament for their suggestion and emulation may look upon them as models of great finish of workmanship, the contemplation and study of which will animate them to emulate their beautifully blended tints of gold, to imitate the harmony of color and sparkling brilliancy of the transparent enamel, and to take as models the elegant mountings, which connect in the simplest and most natural way their several parts, so that the structural features form, as they ought to do, the ground work for a truthful decorative treatment.

It was, as already mentioned, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that most of these works were produced, i. e., not in the early, frequently not even in the high period of the Renaissance, although at that time the art of the goldsmith had already reached a great degree of perfection. Besides the imperishable works of high Art, we owe to the love for magnificence and show which characterised the contemporary popes, cardinals, and most eminent princes, a great number of the productions of the art-worker, having mostly no other object than that of ornament, in the full extent of the word. At royal and princely nuptials the trousseau of the bride used always to comprise a number of magnificent vessels and objects for the adornment of the table, the reception of jewels, ornamental and personal use, such as the refinement and luxury of the time required.

In the fourteenth century arose out of the guild of the Florentine goldsmiths the most eminent artists of the age, masters not only in their own sphere, but first-rate painters, sculptors, and architects, who carried the glorious fame of their school all over the artistic world of their time. Unfortunately not much more than descriptions remain now of the creations of the goldsmith's art of that age; Ghiberti's two magnificently wrought mitres, made for Pope Eugenius IV, have disappeared, the works of Pollajuolo have shared the same fate, and many productions of Turrini, Giovanni del Chiaro, Fra Giocondo del Tonchio, etc., may have perished in a similar way.

It has already been pointed out, and it may further also explain why the Quattro-cento shows so few specimens in that branch of art, that the most gifted goldsmiths were also great masters in other departments of the Fine Arts, the characteristic tendency of their age being pre-eminently directed towards the representation of the human, and works of High Art.

Nevertheless the technical processes had then attained a high degree of perfection. Finiguerra was great

in niello-work; Turrini employed already the enamel *de basse taille*, so characteristic in this and the following period, for the enrichment of jewellery. During and after the sixteenth century, which employed also second rate masters in the useful arts, the reintroduction of crystal-cutting and glyptic, imported into Italy by Greek refugees after the fall of Constantinople, gave a great impulse to the production of those magnificent vessels which now adorn our collections and museums. Favoured by the requirements of wealth and luxury, then predominant and growing more and more general, their possession soon became a matter of fashion.

A great variety of materials were put into requisition; besides the highly valued rock-crystal semi-precious stones, such as opal, agate, sardonyx, lapis-lazuli, beryl, jasper, heliotrop, topaz, etc., were also much sought for. They were frequently also employed in works of art, such as cameoes, intaglios, busts and reliefs, as well as in the productions of Art-industry to which we principally refer here. The work of the lapidary was then often restricted to give to a vessel a graceful sweep of outline, and it was the task of the jeweller to enhance its form by an appropriate artistic enrichment.

Crystal especially was worked in pieces of a dimension now scarcely ever seen, and of a transparent beauty and purity, rarely to be met with. The great perfection which modern glass-manufacture has recently attained is the cause of that diminished demand in the market which explains the scarcity of large and valuable pieces.

It was certainly different in the times of Valerio Vicentino, the most distinguished and renowned master of his art, whose name has, in some measure, become a typical and generic designation for this industrial branch. Valerio di Belli (1546) for this was the real name of this superior genius, worked according to Vasari principally vessels of state for Clement VII who endowed the church San Lorenzo with them, as well as candlesticks for Pope Paul VII, and many other objects of art, now partly in the collection at Florence, partly dispersed in all the museums of the world. Almost every one of our art collections prides itself upon the possession of some of his work, though much is of doubtful authenticity, as are also many of the gold mountings on his vessels which are ascribed to the hand of Cellini. Valerio embellished his productions with most freely and beautifully treated Renaissance ornament, mythological figures, marine-monsters, etc., which in the most delicate manner are engraved into the crystal, so as to produce the effect of an exquisitely fine relief work. Contemporary artists, e. g., Jacopo da Trezzo, Gaspari and Girolamo Misseroni, Sarrachi, and others, were actively engaged in this artistic branch, which was introduced into France by Matteo de Nazzaro who like many others accepted the invitation of king Francis I.

The composition of these magnificent vessels of the sixteenth century, showing an exuberant richness and variety of form and profile, is marked by a greatly refined taste for the beautiful. There are countless variations between the chaste simplicity and graceful elegance of line which

recall the Antique, and the great boldness and effective design of profile, relieved by the metal mounts which serve at the same time to connect the different pieces of crystal in larger vessels. Now we see an egg-shaped goblet on a low foot, and provided with an elaborate lid terminating in an enamelled knob, now an elegant tankard, the lid being entwined by a golden serpent, now a vessel in form of a pail or bucket, mostly in agate, encircled by simple ring-mouldings, and decorated with a richly enamelled handle; but in all instances they show forms of beautiful conception and excellent effect, created by the free and original imagination of the artist.

Not less rich and tasteful in design are plates and salvers which, either circular or polygonal, consist of one or more pieces, again connected by metal mountings. Dishes of colossal dimension were cut out of one piece of rock-crystal, to which the handle only was affixed. Objects of luxury, and for quasi-personal use were also made of crystal mounted in gold, e. g., candlesticks, watch-cases, and knives and forks, of which we find, a fine specimen in the treasury of the Teutonic Order at Vienna. On the crystal bulbs of vases and dishes the Art of the lapidary is displayed in its highest form. Objects of a more simple kind are decorated with flutings; either flat as in the antique candelabrum or vase, or, in better conformity with the transparent and highly refracting material, with deep, bold, and sharp edged channels such as have been successfully employed in modern glass manufacture. Many a fine old specimen, distinguished by a noble simplicity and beauty of form, might be pointed out as an appropriate model for modern reproduction, which without great cost and with but little modification could be manufactured in glass.

The bulbed part of the vessel is frequently enriched with delicate ornament and figure subjects. The acanthus leaves and scrolls, so characteristic of the Renaissance ornament, form an essential part in their composition, and interlaced bands, wreaths of fruit, flowers, and beads, enlivened with birds and fantastic animals are interspersed; but symmetry is only observed in the general arrangement, in the main-lines of the design, a strict repetition of the same forms being incompatible with the whole conception and manufacture of the work. In a still higher degree the decorative subjects of the animal

type display an endless variety of forms and figures. The representation of the sea with its rolling waves is often attempted, and the vivid fancy of the artist peoples it with Dolphins, Nereids, Tritons, Sea-horses, and grotesque monsters of all sort, mostly borrowed from the Antique, from which also bacchanalian types are not unfrequently introduced into the reliefs.

In the mountings, handles and spouts of the vessels, whether worked in the same material or by the goldsmith, the tendency of the art of the epoch to which the specimen belongs is most strikingly revealed. For the most part highly fantastic figures of serpents, reptiles, dragons, winged busts of women, faun's heads, masks, and other chimeras, bent and twisted into a handle, or spitting out from wide-open jaws the contents of the vessel, recall strongly the contemporary bronzes of Giovanni da Bologna or the mural paintings of Perin del Vaga, who evinced a peculiar talent by interspersing their ornamental compositions with grotesque monsters and chimeras. The Antique gave the impulse to a fervid development of the types of this fabulous world; for struck with its exuberance of life and forms, Raphael, immediately after the then newly excavated remains of the Roman baths, received them into the sphere of his own conception. His contemporaries and disciples followed his example, adorning walls, pilasters and friezes with their fantastic decorations, thus imparting a new life and spirit to their ornament. The Grotesque reaches the highest form of expression in a peculiar sort of vessels, which may have owed their origin to the extravagancies and vagaries of artists who prided themselves on conquering great technical difficulties. These are animal types, principally birds, e. g., herons, cocks etc., the hollow bodies of which in cut crystal represent drinking cups which were often enriched with gold, precious stones and pearls. None of the old art-inventories are without specimens of such animal types, and all our modern collections have some to show, especially as they soon became the object of a vastly productive imitative branch of modern industry which keeps a large stock of such curiosities for art-amateurs.

(To be continued.)